

CONFLICT, COMMUNICATION, AND DESIRABLE
PARTNER CHARACTERISTICS IN FIVE
STAGES OF DATING

By

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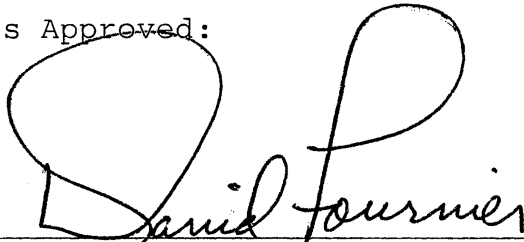
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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Marriage is an institution that most people expect to enter. Some studies have found that 95 percent of people expect to marry at some point in his or her lifetime (Hill, Rubin, & Annepeplau, 1976; Lasswell, 1974). Mace (1985) has reported that people's happiness depends mostly on their experiences in their marital relationships. According to Renne (1970), satisfaction with the marital relationship is an important factor in the well being of an individual, since the spouse is the main source of companionship and emotional support. Cadogan (1982) reported that 25 percent of marriages were described as being satisfactory, while the remaining 75 percent of marriages would likely end in divorce, separation, or continue to remain married but experience marital dissatisfaction.

Although most people plan to marry and expect to be happy with their marriages, statistics from the National Center for Health Statistics (1985) revealed that during 1981, 37.7 percent of divorces and

annulments occurred within the first four years of marriage, while 27.3 percent of marriages were terminated between the fifth and ninth year of marriage.

The National Center for Health Statistics (1985) also revealed that in 1981, there were an estimated 1,213,000 divorces and annulments which involved 1,180,000 children, while the median duration of marriage before the divorce or annulment was 7.0 years.

With statistics suggesting that nearly 38 percent of divorces take place within the first four years of marriage, there is need for a preventive approach to marital dissatisfactions. Fournier, Olson, and Druckman, (1983) suggested that premarital couples are often not aware of potential conflicts that will be experienced in a marital relationship, and that couples do not have enough awareness of the communication skills needed to resolve interpersonal conflicts. Freeman (1965) stated that premarital counseling has been described as being an attempt to minimize marital discord by attempting to enhance principles of healthy marital relationships and to minimize the risk of marital conflicts. Ball and Henning (1981) reported that premarital preparation, which may apply to couples in any stage of dating and not restricted only to

engaged couples, may develop an awareness in premarital couples for the need to identify misleading beliefs and attitudes about marriage which may become a problem after marriage.

Since the communication patterns between couples may affect the degree of relationship satisfaction (Most & Guenney, 1983), an awareness of the importance of communication would be beneficial for dating couples. Schindler, Hahlweg, and Revenstork (1983) reported that communication difficulties are the most frequently cited problems for couples who want to improve their relationship.

Geiss and O'Leary (1981) sent mailed surveys to 250 members of the American Association of Marriage and Family Therapy (AAMFT), who were to select the top five problem areas which are the most detrimental to marital relationships. Communication was ranked first as the most detrimental problem area in marriage, while unrealistic expectations of marriage or of the spouse was ranked second. Other ranked problems include power struggles (3rd), serious individual problems (4th) and role related conflicts (5th).

By assessing the qualities of dating relationships, single adults may be able to identify characteristics

desired in a dating partner. Melton and Thomas (1976) reported that males and females desire the traits of understanding, mutual affection, and emotional maturity in a dating partner.

Examples of desirable characteristics of a dating partner may include any number of personality traits. As couples progress in their relationships to higher stages of dating, they may assess compatibility of personalities more carefully. Incompatible personalities are frequently cited as a reason for terminated engagements (Burgess & Wallin, 1969).

Statement of Problem

Although several issues have an impact on single adults in the dating and mate selection process, this study will primarily focus on three of these concerns. First, evidence on marital disruption in the early stages of marriage suggest that many couples enter marriage without an awareness of potential marital conflicts that may occur. This study will attempt to identify premarital conflicts that have occurred in early stages of dating.

Second, the manner in which couples communicate with each other may affect their degree of relationship

satisfaction. Mace (1982) stated that effective communication is an essential aspect for a successful marriage. Some of these characteristics of effective communication, or communication skills, include being sensitive to feelings, listening, expressing respect and esteem to the partner, speaking for self, and understanding the partner's viewpoint. This research project will identify the perceived importance of some of these communication skills.

Third, by assessing experiences in dating relationships, an individual may develop an awareness of what are considered desirable characteristics in a dating partner. Blood (1956) has identified some of these characteristics that males and females desire in a dating partner, as being pleasant and cheerful, having a sense of humor, being a good sport, being natural, being considerate, and being neat. This study will identify stage of dating and sex differences in the degree of importance of characteristics desired in a dating partner.

Purpose of the Study

Single, never married adults have been described as having unrealistic attitudes about marriage. By

providing single adults an opportunity to assess dating experiences, single adults may be able to challenge some of their attitudes. This study will provide a selected sample of college students with the opportunity to express opinions about various experiences from their dating relationships. The specific purposes of this study are:

1. to identify conflicts which are common in five stages of dating;
2. to identify the manner in which premarital couples react to conflicts;
3. to identify communication skills commonly experienced in premarital relationships;
4. to identify characteristics desired in a dating partner; and,
5. to relate conflict and communication to the variables of gender and stage of relationship.

General Statement of Hypotheses

As single adults progress through various stages of dating, each stage may be characterized as having certain functions. One function, for instance, is that single adults are provided opportunities to interact with the number of different dating partners and hence,

a variety of differing personalities. Consequently, a dater is provided with an experiential basis for assessing the degree of compatibility between his or her personality traits and those personality traits of the other dating partner.

In order to provide single adults with criteria for assessing a variety of interpersonal relationship issues, this research project will examine a number of qualitative aspects of dating relationships. The following conceptual hypotheses will be examined in this research study:

1. each stage of dating will have specific conflicts that are more important;
2. there will be gender differences in the types of interpersonal conflicts experienced in dating relationships;
3. importance of communication skills will be different by stages;
4. there will be gender differences in the rating of the importance of communication skills;
5. each successive stage of dating will have different ratings on the importance of specific characteristics of a dating partner;

and,

6. there will be gender differences in characteristics desired in a dating partner.

Definition of Terms

To understand the issues involved in this research project, the following terms will be used throughout this study and are defined as follows:

CARE - an acronym for Couples Assessment of Relationship Experiences, the assessment device used in in this study.

Casual Dating - a non-committed relationship for fun, recreation, and companionship (Springer, Fournier, & Olson, 1978).

Serious Dating - a non-committed love relationship for companionship and for doing activities together (Springer et al., 1978).

Steady Dating - a love relationship with either an implied or stated commitment, but is not marriage orientated (Springer et al., 1978).

Pre-engaged - a love relationship with either an implied or stated commitment towards marriage, but no marriage plans have been arranged (Springer et al., 1978).

Engaged - a love relationship with a stated commitment towards marriage in which formal plans for marriage have been accomplished (Springer et al., 1978).

Conflict - disagreements which are mutually realized and brought out in the open (Orthner, 1981).

Conflict Resolution - the manner in which couples react to resolve conflicts in their relationships (Fournier, 1981).

Communication - the process in which people transmit their attitudes, facts, beliefs, and feelings in order to understand each other and see problems and differences from each other's viewpoint. Communication is expressed not only with words, but also in non-verbal forms such as listening, silence, facial expressions, gestures, touch and all other non-language symbols and clues in giving and receiving meaning (Bienvenu, 1969).

Outline of Thesis

In order to provide an overview of the entire thesis, the following outline is included.

Chapter I is the introductory chapter. The chapter begins with information about the high divorce

rate and the importance of premarriage preparation in order to identify potential conflict areas and to develop an awareness of the dynamics involved in marital relationships.

Chapter II is a review of literature pertinent to the study. Chapter II includes an overview of dating and marital satisfaction, conflict identification and resolution, importance of communication in relationships, and identification of characteristics desired in a dating partner.

Chapter III is the methodology chapter, which describes the research design, the instrument, data collection procedures, data coding, data analysis, and limitations of the study.

Chapter IV lists the results of the research findings. This chapter begins with characteristics of the subjects, and the results are shown, in table format, of the six hypotheses and the research questions to be addressed.

Chapter V is a summary of the findings of this research project. This chapter includes a review of relevant literature, summary of the methods and findings, and recommendations for future research.

CHAPTER II

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

The primary goal of this project is to explore the importance of conflict, communication, and personal characteristics of individuals who are in various stages of dating. These factors are associated with later marital satisfaction and it is assumed that an awareness of conflicts and other communication skills will increase partner compatibility and realistic expectations about marriage. The literature reviewed for this study will be organized into several sections to meet the desired goals. These include: (1) an overview of the dating process; (2) factors affecting marital satisfaction; (3) common conflicts in dating relationship; (4) communication styles and skills in dating; and (5) characteristics desired in a dating partner.

Overview of Dating Process

The Dating Process

There are a variety of theories which describes the manner in which single people meet, progress

through various stages of dating, and become married. Some suggested aspects to assess in the dating process include rapport, self disclosure patterns, values in the personal needs, personality and value compatibility, and the degree of importance of demographic variables. An awareness of the manner in which interpersonal relationships are formed may provide greater insight for dating couples to assess past and present dating relationships, decide which aspects of dating were satisfactory and unsatisfactory, and be able to assess compatibility with a dating partner.

Each stage of dating is specific in its purpose. Delora (1963) asserted that the purposes of dating were different by stages of dating. The purpose of casual dating was to become acquainted, and is an uninvolved relationship. Steady dating is for entertainment, enjoyment, and is an uncommitted relationship. Going steady is an intimate, and emotional relationship with the goal of companionship. Engaged to be engaged is an intimate, emotional, future orientated relationship with the main purpose of a trial engagement.

McDaniel (1969) has identified stages of dating as progressing from random dating, to going steady, to becoming pinned/engaged. Random dating is dating no

one in particular. The purpose is for recreation or enjoying opposite sex interaction. Going steady involves dating a particular person but there is no commitment to marry. The purpose of going steady is for mate selection, or looking for either a compatible dating or marriage partner. The pinned/engaged stage involves dating a special person and plans have been made for marriage. The purpose of this stage is anticipatory socialization, or the process of learning the skills which are needed to assume specific marriage roles.

Functions of Dating

The dating process serves some important functions. Stinnett and Walters (1977) stated the importance of dating is to provide an opportunity for an individual to (a) meet and develop relationships with a variety of potential partners, (b) increase self understanding in regards with personal values, emotional needs, interests, goals, likes and dislikes relative to similar characteristics in a dating partner, (c) develop the relationship skills of listening, talking, and consideration towards other people, all of which are important skills for the development and

maintenance of relationships, (d) develop comfort in relating with members of the opposite sex, and (e) test for compatibility by means of interacting with people of a variety of different personality types in dating relationships.

Problems in Dating

The dating process includes a number of problem situations which prevents couples from establishing a meaningful relationship. Waller (1937) describes the dating process as exploitative in nature, with a facade of emotional involvement and commitment. Furthermore, the selection of a dating partner is contingent upon the partner's ranking on the "social desirability scale," which is the degree of being highly rated by one's peers. For instance, males are considered as a desirable date provided: that they have money, are involved in activities, are well dressed, are "smooth" in manners and appearance, dance well, and have a car or have access to a car. Females are considered as a desirable dating partner provided that they are well dressed, can dance well, and, are perceived as a popular date.

Gordon (1981), however, reports that the dating-

rating complex mentioned by Waller (1937) has diminished between the years 1930-1980; hence, the dating-rating complex is no longer a significant aspect of dating relationships.

Olson (1972) states that dating couples frequently have unrealistic expectations about marriage, such as:

1. unhappy marriages will somehow improve with time;
2. a partner will satisfy all of one's needs;
3. disagreements will have a detrimental effect on a relationship;
4. marriage will change one's fiancée for the better;
5. children will bring the husband and wife closer together and will solve their difficulties;
6. love will solve all problems; and
7. marriage is the only manner in which to be happy.

Compatibility

Assessing qualitative aspects in interpersonal relationships may assist premarital dating couples to evaluate their degree of relationship satisfaction and

provide couples with criteria for assessing experiences in past and present dating relationships.

The following criteria mentioned by Stinnett and Walters (1977) may assist single adults in evaluating their dating experiences.

One criteria is "know yourself", which includes identifying one's important needs, the amount of attention needed from others, and the reasons for marriage, which may include a sincere degree of affection for each other, having many shared interests and goals, sexual attraction, or viewing marriage as a way to escape loneliness, or to escape from parents.

"Know the future spouse" is another criteria. This criteria includes feeling comfortable together, being aware of the future spouses' important needs and values, and to consider whether or not each other's values are compatible or incompatible.

Psychological comfortableness is another criteria which involves feeling at ease with each other, being oneself and acting natural with the partner, being able to confide with each other, trusting each other, and feeling confident that the partner has a sense of commitment to the relationship.

Love is another criteria. Each member of the

relationship may consider whether or not the relationship is characterized by love or infatuation. Infatuation is an attraction to one aspect of a person without a mutual care for the partner. A common assumption is that people "fall into" love, and that there is nothing to learn about love. However, Fromm (1956) mentions that there are components of love. One component is care for one's partner. Care is characterized by a concern, and interest in the partner; a desire to enhance the partner's well being and feelings of happiness; wanting the partner to develop and grow in a manner which is to the partner's benefit. Responsibility to the partner is another component of love. Responsibility implies not intentionally hurting the partner, either psychologically or physically and also includes being sensitive to the needs of the partner. Another component of love is knowledge of the partner's needs, values, goals, and feelings of the partner. A final component of love is a commitment to love, in order to enhance the welfare, happiness, and growth of the partner.

Factors Associated With Marital Satisfaction

Length of Acquaintance

In the book Courtship, Engagement, and Marriage, Burgess, Wallin and Schultz (1954) stated that a length of acquaintance between nine months to three years is a sufficient length of time to know each other prior to marriage. Grover, Russell, Schumm & Paff-Berger (1985) reported that the longer time spent dating increases chances of marital satisfaction, because there are more opportunities to experience some typical problems, irritations, and frustration that occur with intimate relationships; hence, couples are able to screen out incompatible dating partners.

Age of Marriage

Marital dissatisfaction is greatest for those couples who marry in their teen years (Booth & Edwards, 1985). Lasswell (1974) recommended that a good age for males to marry is between 27 to 30 years old, while the recommended age for marriage for females is 25 years old. For those couples who desire to have children, the suggested age range for pregnancy is

between 21 to 33 years old, because a pregnancy in the teen years has more likelihood of complications during delivery, while a delay in pregnancy after certain age can result in birth defects due to the effects of the aging process on fertility.

Role Expectations

Discrepancies between role expectations and role enactments may result in interpersonal conflict (Hurvitz, 1965; Taylor, 1967; Clinebelle & Clinebelle, 1970; Quick & Jacob, 1973). Another role related issue is called role expansion or increasing additional role responsibilities without reducing other role responsibilities. In a study which involved 106 female faculty members of a northwestern university, Yogev (1981) reported that these professional women still wanted to assume housework and child care roles, and either did not expect nor want their husbands to equally share with these particular roles; however, these women perceived their husbands as being equal to themselves.

Children

Glenn and Weaver (1978) reported that the presence

of children six years old and younger resulted in marital dissatisfaction more often than with the presence of older children. One explanation offered for this finding was that the presence of children requires time and attention which could otherwise be invested in the marital relationship. Children may also serve as another source of conflict due to differences about parenthood issues. Children may also serve as a barrier force which maintains an unhappy marriage which might have otherwise been dissolved (Levinger, 1976).

Wives' Employment

The wives' employment status, per se, may not necessarily be the critical factor relative to its effect on marital satisfaction, but familial attitudes towards the females' employment outside of the home. Houseknecht and Macke (1981), for instance, stated that a supportive husband, one who does not put pressure on the wife to terminate her job in order to advance his employment possibilities, and one who shares similar attitudes about women's employment is a main factor related to the effects of wives' employment on the degree of marital satisfaction.

In-Laws

The more a spouse gets along with in-laws, the greater the probability of marital satisfaction. Mace (1985) mentioned that one source of in-law conflicts occurs when a married couple moves in with in-laws. This type of living arrangement creates too much tension and conflict for all parties involved. Efforts should be made to establish good relationships with in-laws because families may experience crises in the future, and may need to rely on in-laws during a crisis situation.

Religion

Although there is a positive relationship between attending church and marital satisfaction and stability, Kunz and Albrecht (1977) stated that since most churches stress the importance of the permanence of the marital bond, the termination of the marital bond is an unacceptable practice, hence, some religiously active couples may endure an unhappy marriage rather than dissolve the marriage for individual happiness.

Interpersonal Conflicts

Since conflicts are an inevitable aspect of intimate relationships, conflicts per se may not be detrimental to a relationship, however, the manner in which couples react to resolve their conflicts may be detrimental to a relationship. . Being able to identify potential conflicts, being able to communicate about those conflicts, and being able to resolve conflicts are skills which will be beneficial for premarital dating couples.

Premarital Conflicts

Burgess and Wallin (1969) have identified five frequently cited reasons for broken engagements, which are lack of emotional involvement, frequent separation (physical separation), parental opposition, cultural differences, as in race and nationality, and personality differences, as emotional immaturity, moodiness, unsatisfied personality needs not being met in the relationship. An example is when a partner has an expectation to receive physical and verbal expressions of affection but the partner does not provide those affectional behaviors.

Marital Conflicts

Some conflicts may be more common in marriage than in dating relationships. Being aware of potential future conflicts after marriage may assist single adults to identify areas of similarities and differences in dating relationships.

In an analyses of 1,412 help request letters of couples who are experiencing marital problems, Deburger (1967) reported that the three main marital problems were affectional problems (spouse is unaffectionate, loves someone else, jealous). Affectional related problems were reported by more wives than husbands. Another common marital problem was sexual related problems, which were reported by more husbands than wives. The third most common marital problem was personality related issues, which include domination, incompatibility, moodiness, nagging, irresponsibility, and being undependable. Personality related problems were reported more often by husbands than wives. Other common marital problems reported more often by wives than husbands are the husband's jealousy, he loves someone else, he desires sex too often, he is dissatisfied with their sexual relations, disagreements

about division of labor, his drinking, and his extra marital affairs. Husbands cited more often than the wives the problems of dissatisfaction with sexual relations and the wives' moodiness.

Both husbands and wives reported that affectional problems increased as the length of marriage increased. Personality problems increased for both husbands and wives as the length of marriage increased. In terms of blaming each other for the marital problems, both wives and husbands blamed the husbands for the marital conflicts.

Safran (1979) reported that the results of a 1979 survey of 730 marriage counselors ranked the ten most common conflict areas which cause couples to seek marital counseling. These include: (a) communication difficulties, (b) loss of mutual goals and interests, (c) sexual incompatibility, (d) infidelity, (e) the fun and excitement have dissipated, (f) money, (g) children, (h) alcohol and drug abuse, (i) women's equality issues, and (j) in-laws.

Divorced Person's Perceptions of Conflicts

Since a divorce is the end of a marital

relationship and statistics have reported that there are about 1,200,000 divorces a year (National Center for Health Statistics, 1985), dating couples may benefit from an awareness of conflicts experienced by divorced people. Some benefits for dating couples, for instance, may be for them to compare their similarities and differences in personalities, interests and values.

Although conflicts experienced in marital relationships may be very similar to the types of conflicts experienced in the former marriages of divorced persons, married couples may still have an opportunity to settle their conflicts through marital therapy. Divorced people, however, may not have been able to satisfactorily resolve conflicts in their former marriages.

Levinger (1966), in a study of applicants for divorce, reported that wives complained more often than husbands about the problems of physical abuse, financial problems, alcohol problems, lack of love, ex husbands verbal abuse (name calling, shouting), and husband's lack of involvement in the home and child care. Husbands complained more often than the wives about the problems of in-laws and sexual incompatibility.

Burns (1984) reported in a study which involved 335 divorced and separated subjects, that the main perceived causes of divorce were: sexual incompatibility, reported by 56 percent of the husbands and 40 percent of the wives, lack of communication and interests, reported by 41 percent of husbands and 40 percent of the wives. Other problems most often cited by the wives include the husbands' lack of time spent at home, husbands' adultery, and the husbands' drinking. Husbands reported more often than wives the wives' adultery and in-law problems. Cleek and Pearson (1985), in a study which involved 611 subjects reported that the three most common problems cited by both males and females were communication, basic unhappiness, and incompatibility. In reference to gender differences in perceived causes of divorce, females reported more often than males the problems of emotional abuse, alcohol abuse of the husband, infidelity of husband, and physical abuse. Husbands reported more often than wives alcohol abuse of self and women's lib.

In a study which involved a questionnaire and interview from 138 males and females who were married for at least 15 years prior to obtaining a divorce, Hayes, Stinnett and Defrain (1980, p.24) reported the

following perceived causes of divorce from 138 males and females married at least 15 years prior to the divorce.

Poor selection/timing of marriage. Some subjects (25 percent) reported their marriages were a mistake from the beginning because of the young age at marriage. Some of the wives (75 percent) were 20 years old or less at the time of the marriage. Reported reasons for marriage include: to get away from home, guilt about being premaritally sexually active, and a premarital pregnancy.

Control. Some respondents (67 percent) mentioned that the husband controlled and dominated the marital relationship.

Communication. Some respondents (75 percent) reported their partners were not easy to talk with. Some communication problems include one partner was unwilling to talk or share feelings (more common among the husbands than among the wives), and the partner was overly judgemental.

Contribution to Self Esteem. Most respondents reported that the partner either seldom or never aided in one's self esteem, but their patterns of interaction was such that the partner was overly critical, made

disparaging remarks in public, ignored the partner, was insensitive to feelings, sexually rejected the partner, and did not like the partner to engage in activities outside of the home. Throughout the course of the marital relationship, the husbands' self concept was positive, while the wives self concept became negative.

Companionship. Some respondents (60 percent) reported a decline in shared activities, due to other family related responsibilities, such as the presence of children, employment, housework, and individual interests.

Caring. Most of the respondents were displeased with the amount of affection expressed by their former spouses.

Personal Appearance. Some respondents (65 percent) were content with the appearance of the former spouse. Most complaints involved weight gain and grooming. The wives reported that they took better care of themselves after the divorce.

Careers. Over 50 percent of the subjects mentioned that husbands' success in his career hurt the relationship, while also the husbands' lack of success in his career also hurt the marital relationship. This resulted in a blow to the husbands'

ego and the increased financial difficulties. Some subjects (40 percent) reported that the wives' employment contributed to marital dissatisfaction.

Extramarital Affairs. Some husbands (75 percent) and some wives (25 percent) reported having an extramarital affair. The affairs of the husbands occurred earlier in the marriage and occurred without the wives' awareness of the affair. For the wives, the affair was a way to affirm themselves as women since they were ignored as wives in the marriage.

Mid Life Changes. Both husbands and wives reported that changes in personality, values, and interests occurred more often in the husbands. The husbands perceived these changes as positive, but the wives perceived these changes as negative.

Over 50 percent of the respondents reported that learning of the partner's extramarital affair was the main reason for filing for a divorce. In terms of assessing the value of the divorce, 40 percent of the respondents reported that the divorce should have occurred sooner, 33 percent became happier after the divorce, 14 percent considered the divorce a mistake, and 11 percent mentioned there was no choice and had to accept the divorce.

Conflict Resolution

Being able to talk about resolving conflicts may contribute to relationship satisfaction. Strong (1975) proposes the Conflict Resolution Method (CRM) to resolve conflicts. The skills of the CRM includes listening, which also includes empathy, rapport, and the use of feedback. Another skill is speaking, which includes the expressing of one's feelings, needs, ideas, and thoughts so that the partner understands the other's viewpoint. Selecting alternate choices is another skill which involves whether or not the choice meets the needs of both partners.

Other CRM strategies include identifying the issue and selecting the best time to discuss differences. If the present time is not suitable to discuss a disagreement, the discussion may occur in the immediate future. This will allow time for each partner to reflect upon feelings and needs which are affected by the disagreement. Another strategy includes the use of feedback, which allows the receiver of the message to acknowledge the message was understood, and permits the sender of the message to verify that the message was correctly understood. A final strategy includes an

evaluation and modification of the alternatives which were implemented to resolve conflicts.

Bell, Chafets and Horn (1982) have identified four power strategies which couples may use in conflict situations. One strategy includes the use of authority, which are the norms regarding who makes certain decisions. A second strategy includes control attempts, in which compliance is desired irregardless of the partner's viewpoint. A third strategy includes influence, in which the partner is persuaded to agree by means of discussing the issue. A fourth strategy includes manipulation, which involves seeking compliance of the partner through the use of overt behaviors, such as pouting, crying, or withdrawing.

For the husbands, the authority strategy was the most effective method of dealing with conflict situations, while control is the least effective strategy. For the wives, the most effective strategy was influence, while authority is the least effective strategy used to resolve conflicts; however, husbands win conflicts irregardless of strategy used.

Communication Styles and Skills

The communication patterns which are experienced

in relationships may affect the degree of relationship satisfaction (Most & Guerney, 1983). Having an awareness of communication skills and an awareness about factors which differentiate effective and ineffective communication patterns may enhance relationship satisfaction.

Noller (1984) reported that the following communication skills affect the degree of relationship satisfaction. First is self disclosure, or the revealing of personal information about oneself. A second skill involves being sensitive to each other's feelings, which includes seeing situations from the partner's viewpoint and can empathize, accept, and understand the feelings of the partner. A third skill is listening. Listening to a partner's complaints is an important aspect of listening, because each member of the dyad know his or her complaints have been heard. Empathetic listening involves the use of paraphrasing the content and feelings expressed by the partner so the partner will know the message was correctly interpreted, and to clarify unclear or misunderstood messages. A fourth skill is confirmation, which is accepting the other person as a worthwhile person, even when disagreements exist between the couple. A fifth

skill is expressing respect and esteem to the partner, and includes expressing appreciation for the partner and a respect for the ideas of the partner. Miller, Nunnaly, and Wackman (1979) mentioned that one communication skill is to allow the partner to speak for himself or herself.

Effective Communication Patterns

Bienvenu (1970) suggested that some factors related to good communication patterns include having shared interests and activities, talking frequently with each other, and lifting the partner's spirits when he or she is upset. Ball (1976) found that factors resulting in good marital communication includes talking out problems together, which was reported by more wives than husbands, understanding and empathy, which were reported by more husbands than wives, and honesty and openness in communication.

In a study which identified communication patterns between twenty-four happily and twenty-four unhappily married couples, Navran (1967) found that happily married couples were more likely than unhappily married couples to: (a) talk with each other more often, (b) give feedback to verify the message was understood,

(c) have many different subjects to discuss, (d) have an open communication system, (e) be sensitive to the partner's feelings, (f) personalize their language, and (g) use both verbal and nonverbal forms of communication.

Ineffective Communication Patterns

Noller (1984) reported that factors related to dissatisfaction within relationships included not listening, not paying attention to partner, not expressing affection to partner, criticizing, and nagging. Miller et al. (1979) stated that ordering and blaming the partner are common types of ineffective communication patterns.

In one study which involved 316 subjects, Bienvenu (1971) identified factors which are common in ineffective communication patterns. One factor is low self concept, in that a low self concept results in difficulty for an individual to admit he or she is wrong in situations, and the person may have difficulty accepting criticism and expressing ideas which are different than those of the partner. Lack of clarity in communication, which may result in unclear messages may result in misunderstandings. Another factor includes angry feelings. One partner may not express

his or her true opinions or ideas because the partner may become angry. Another factor includes self disclosure, when a partner will not reveal personal information about himself or herself, or when an individual does not express feelings and ideas to his or her partner.

Characteristics Desired in a Dating Partner

Since a function of dating is to assess compatibility with a dating partner, the dating process may provide a learning experience to identify characteristics desired in a dating partner. Karp, Jackson, and Lester (1970) suggested that a partner is chosen because of compatibility between personalities. Hewitt (1958, p.345) conducted a study which involved college students' viewpoints of desirable traits desired in a dating partner and in a future marriage partner, and found that both males and females checked as "crucially important" traits desired in a dating partner as being: (a) well groomed and well mannered; (b) have a sense of humor; (c) considerate; (d) emotionally mature; (e) ambitious and industrious (not lazy); (f) healthy and having vitality (energetic); and

(g) sensible about money (not a spendthrift). The same seven traits which both males and females view as "crucially important" traits desired in a dating partner are also reported as being important in the selection of a marriage partner. Another set of traits that between one third to one half of both males and females viewed as "crucial" more than "irrelevant" in a dating partner include (Hewitt, 1958, p.345):

- (a) normal heredity (no serious defects);
- (b) intellectually stimulating (well educated);
- (c) does not over drink; (d) religious in nature (being a church participant); and (e) similar backgrounds (religion, economic status).

College students were administered the Dating Rating Checklist (DRC) in a study conducted by Hansen and Hicks (1980). The DRC has three columns, with a total of thirty-three items reflecting personality and prestige factors. In one column, the respondents are to select characteristics perceived as important to peers. In another column, the respondents are to select characteristics personally considered important in a dating partner, while in the last column, the respondents are to select characteristics considered important in a future spouse. Personality

characteristics were reported as most important in all three columns. Sindberg, Roberts, and McClain (1972) also found that similarities in personality was an important trait in computer matched couples.

The identification of desireable personality traits commonly occurs during the later stages of dating rather than the earlier stages of dating. A reason may be that during the earlier stages, the couple is in the process of becoming acquainted and little information is known about each other. Through continued interaction over time, the couple may feel at ease with each other. The feeling at ease may facilitate communication and the amount of self disclosure, or revealing information about oneself, as hobbies, interests, likes and dislikes.

CHAPTER III

METHODOLOGY

Type of Research

In order to identify conflicts, communication skills, and qualities desired in a dating partner, the descriptive research design was used. As stated in Isaac and Michael (1981), the purpose of descriptive research is to describe facts and characteristics of a population. Descriptive research does not, however, seek to discover or explain relationships between variables. The exploratory nature of the study is particularly suited for descriptive research.

Subject Selection

The sample consisted of single college students who lived on the campus of the Oklahoma State University during the Spring 1986 semester. A purposive sample was used in conjunction with random selection. The subjects were selected in order to obtain a representative sample of Oklahoma State University students, who would not be restricted to any

one particular academic major. Since a younger age was desired in order to identify some common conflicts experienced in early stages of dating relationships, freshmen and sophomore students were considered to be most suitable. Since these subjects would be conveniently accessible at a residence hall on campus, the sample was selected from one high rise residence hall. There were 1,238 males and females in the residence hall (659 males, or 53 percent; and 579 females, or 47 percent) and a target population of 250 subjects was desired. Every fifth name was selected from the roster of students to draw a sample of 250.

Instrumentation

The instrument used in this research project was developed by the author from a number of sources and referred to as CARE, an acronym for Couples Assessment of Relationship Experiences. Background information collected for each respondent included birthdate, gender, college major, year in school, number dated, and number of serious dates. Assessment of the primary dependent variables in this study will be discussed separately.

CARE was developed in part from the Relationship

Conflict Questionnaire (RCQ), used by Springer, Fournier, and Olson (1978). The RCQ allows respondents to select a stage of dating, list three specific problems experienced in the relationship, indicate self commitment and the perception of the partner's strength of commitment, and answered questions about their background. Categories of items from CARE can be found in Appendix A.

CARE expanded upon the RCQ by including scales to assess the frequencies of many types of conflicts, the manner in which couples react to resolve conflicts, the importance of communication skills, and the degree of importance in characteristics desired in a dating partner. See Appendix B for a copy of CARE. A description of the major sub-scales follows:

Conflict. Premarital dating conflicts consisted of fifty four items which were answered on a five point scale. The items identified the frequency of occurrence of common premarital conflicts. These conflicts addressed concerns about personality, communication, background, sex, amount of time spent together, habits, power, commitment, friends, and values. Response choices for each item were (1) never, (2) rarely, (3) sometimes, (4) often, and (5) very

often. Each conflict is treated independently and are not scaled for this study. The full 54 item list is in Appendix A.

Conflict Resolution. The conflict resolution scale consisted of twenty three items. The scale identified common patterns used by couples to resolve conflicts experienced in their relationships. The response choice were (1) neither, (2) self, (3) partner, and (4) both. However, due to the small sample size, the four response choices were collapsed into self and partner. The conflict resolution scale measures self perception of the respondents preferred manner for resolving conflicts and their perception of the ways in which their partner resolves conflicts. Combined with gender, this study will be able to look at male and female perceptions of the ways in which conflicts are resolved.

Communication. The importance of communication skills is a scale consisting of ten items. Communication is the process that people use to express attitudes, facts, beliefs, and feelings. This process facilitates the understanding of each other's viewpoint. Response choices were on the following five point scale: (1) unimportant, (2) somewhat important, (3) important

(4) very important, and (5) extremely important.

Communication skills were examined by stage and gender differences. Scale scores ranged from 10 to 40.

Partner Characteristics. This scale measured the degree of importance of selected characteristics desired in a dating partner. These characteristics basically reflect personality traits and the importance of homogamous preferences relative to hobbies/interests, recreation/sports, life goals, religion, racial group, level of completed schooling, age range, and social class.

The partner characteristics subscale is assessed on a four point scale with the following response choices: (1) unimportant, (2) somewhat important, (3) important, and (4) very important. Partner characteristics were examined by stage and gender differences. Scale scores ranged from 21 to 84.

Data Collection Procedure

The 250 questionnaires and cover letters were sent by campus mail. The cover letter explained the purpose of the research project and stressed that confidentiality would be maintained. The subjects also used the campus mail without expense to the students to

return the questionnaires to the campus post office. The average length of time for completing the questionnaire was between 20 to 30 minutes.

The returned surveys were forwarded to a departmental office, where they were picked up. Every fifth name on the roster of students was chosen and each subject was assigned a three digit identification number. By using the number instead of a name, confidentiality was guaranteed.

The surveys were sent to the subjects during the end of the Spring 1986 semester, a time when students are preoccupied with preparing for finals and finishing up other class assignments. This may partially account for a low return rate of 69 out of 250 (28 percent) questionnaires.

Data Coding

The data on each inventory were coded to numerical format after each inventory was received. The numerical codes represent aspects of variables, which are then given column locations on a code sheet. After coding, each code sheet was checked with its corresponding research instrument. The purpose of this process is to check for obvious mistakes, such as

answering the variable gender with a 3 instead of either a 1 (for male), or 2 (for female). All errors that were identified were corrected prior to analysis.

A variable codebook was produced listing locations of variables, the value codes for each subject, and a complete set of descriptive statistics for each variable.

Operational Hypotheses

In order to identify stage and gender differences in conflicts, communication skills, and characteristics desired in a dating partner, the following hypotheses are examined in this study:

- I. The primary conflicts associated with each stage of relationship will be different according to the stage (casual, serious, steady, pre-engaged, engaged).
- II. Men will report different types of primary relationship conflicts than women.
- III. The importance of communication skills will be different according to stage of dating (casual, serious, steady, pre-engaged, and engaged).
- IV. Men will report different ratings on the importance of communication skills than women.

- V. Persons in higher stages of dating relationships (casual, serious, steady, pre-engaged, and engaged) have different ratings on the importance of specific characteristics of a dating partner than persons in lower stages.
- VI. Males will have different ratings on the importance of specific characteristics of a dating partner than females.

Statistical Analyses

Results were originally calculated using parametric statistics like t-test and F, however, due to sample size it was necessary to present most of the findings using descriptive statistics and rankings. Significance of differences between groups are noted wherever it is appropriate given the limitation of sample size.

The Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) at Oklahoma State University was used to analyze the data. SPSS statistical procedures available during the Fall of 1986 were accessed for computer analysis.

Hypotheses I, II, III, IV, V and VI were originally analyzed with the breakdown procedure in

SPSS which resulted in a one-way analysis of variance. A one-way analysis of variance is an appropriate statistical test when dependent variables are quantitative and are measured at the interval level of measurement and when the independent variables have three or more values. Final analysis used the means from the above procedures for ranking and descriptive purposes.

The research question which examined sex differences in the manner in which couples resolve conflicts used the SPSS Crosstabs procedure. Crosstabs is an appropriate procedure to use when a variable is quantitative and is measured at the nominal level of measurement. Crosstabs produces chi-square, degrees of freedom, and significant level. The procedure resulted in a 2 x 2 contingency table. The column variable was sex, while the row variables were "self" and "partner". The four cells revealed the frequencies of males' \ perceptions of the manner in which they react to resolve conflicts, males' perceptions of manner in which females react to resolve conflicts, females' perceptions of their manner in which they react to resolve conflicts, and females' perceptions of males' manner in which they react to resolve conflicts.

Limitations

Of the 250 questionnaires which were mailed to the subjects, 69 were returned. This response rate of 28 percent resulted in a small sample size and is one limitation of this research study. Kerlinger (1964) stated that response rates of less than 50 percent are typical for mailed questionnaires, and due to the low response rates of mailed questionnaires, generalizations must be made very cautiously and restricted to the research sample. One limitation of a small sample size is that there are not enough subjects to meet the minimum requirements of some statistical procedures. Findings in this study will not be generalized beyond the sample that is reported. One limitation with a response rate of 28 percent is not knowing how the non-respondents (72 percent) may be similar or different from the respondents (28 percent).

A second limitation is incomplete questionnaires, which further reduces the available sample for analysis and limits generalizability. Some analyses were performed on a smaller number of cases than is desirable.

Due to time constraints, a third limitation is

that follow-up reminders were not sent to non-respondents. This procedure could have increased the sample size to meet higher standards of analysis.

A fourth limitation is the use of a new instrument which does not have established levels of reliability and validity. Results from an instrument with an unknown reliability and validity must be carefully qualified in subsequent analysis.

CHAPTER IV

RESULTS

This study was designed to identify common conflicts, communication skills, and qualities desired in a dating partner. Those variables will be analyzed by differences in stages of dating and gender.

Characteristics of Subjects

A description of the 69 subjects who participated in this study is presented in Table I. The subjects included 27 males (39.1 percent) and 42 females (60.9 percent). The subjects ranged in age from 19 to 31 years, with the greatest percentage (37.7 percent) being 20 years old. The greatest percentage of subjects (81.2 percent) were Freshmen and Sophomores. Most of the subjects were Arts and Sciences majors (31.9 percent). The subjects who have dated 6 to 10 people included 33.9 percent while the greatest percentage of subjects have had 1 to 2 serious relationships (59.4 percent). The subjects reported themselves in the following stages of dating: casual 21.7 percent; serious 21.7 percent; steady 18.8

TABLE I
CHARACTERISTICS OF SUBJECTS

Characteristic	N (69)	%	Characteristic	N (69)	%
<u>Sex</u>			<u>Number Dated</u>		
Male	27	39.1	0	1	1.4
Female	42	60.9	1-2	2	2.9
			3-5	21	30.4
			6-10	23	33.3
<u>Age</u>			11-20	18	26.1
19	23	33.3	20+	4	5.8
20	26	37.7			
21+	20	28.8			
<u>Year in School</u>			<u>Number of Serious Relationship</u>		
Freshman	32	46.4	0	10	14.5
Sophomore	24	34.8	1-2	41	59.4
Junior	6	8.7	3-5	14	20.3
Senior	5	7.4	6-10	4	5.8
Graduate	1	1.4			
<u>Major</u>			<u>Subjects in Sex</u>		
Agriculture	4	5.8	<u>Each Stage</u>	<u>M</u>	<u>F</u>
Arts & Science	22	31.9	Casual	7	8
Business	12	17.4	Serious	8	7
Education	6	8.7	Steady	5	8
Engineering	8	11.6	Pre-engaged	3	9
Home Economics	7	10.1	Engaged	2	6
Veterinary Med.	1	1.4			
Undecided	8	11.6			
<u>Stage of Dating</u>					
Casual	15	21.7			
Serious	15	21.7			
Steady	13	18.8			
Pre-engaged	12	17.4			
Engaged	8	11.6			

percent; pre-engaged 17.4 percent; and engaged 11.6 percent.

Examination of Hypotheses

Hypothesis I. The primary conflicts associated with each stage of relationship will be different according to the stage (casual, serious, steady, pre-engaged, engaged).

This hypothesis reflects findings in research studies that there may be stage differences in conflicts. Springer, et al. (1978) identified personality issues as a main source of problems for serious, steady, pre-engaged, and engaged stages of dating, while commitment differences are problematic for friendship and causal daters.

A one way analysis of variance was used to examine this hypothesis. The means were ranked to provide a descriptive summary for this variable.

Table II lists the rank ordering of relationship conflicts by stage of dating. The most common conflict in this study for all groups was "living far apart makes dating difficult." Casual daters reported "lack of time spent together" as the most common conflict. Serious daters ranked "one of us is too independent" as

TABLE II
RELATIONSHIP CONFLICTS RANKED
BY STAGE OF RELATIONSHIP

Conflict Description	Overall Rank	Stage of Relationship				
		Casual	Serious	Steady	Pre-Engaged	Engaged
Living far apart makes dating difficult	1	2	4.5	1	1	2.5
Lack of time spent together	2	1	10.5	16.5	9	1
Moodiness	3	-	6	2	2	5
Sarcasm	4	6	4.5	5.5	7.5	8
I feel I "Give" more than I "Get"	5.5	6	2	-	-	-
One of us takes the other for granted	5.5	6	15	11.5	7.5	11.5
One of us becomes angry when we disagree	7.5	11.5	10.5	-	5.5	2.5
One of us is too independent	7.5	10	1	16.5	-	-
Our involvement with school studies	9	16.5	3	-	3	-
Jealousy	10	-	10.5	3	5.5	14
Immaturity	11.5	-	10.5	9	12	17.5
Remarks are made that hurts other's feelings	11.5	-	10.5	-	4	11.5
Frequency of major disagreements	13	-	7	5.5	-	17.5
Do not understand partner's viewpoint	14	16.5	-	5.5	-	6

TABLE II (Continued)

Conflict Description	Overall Rank	Stage of Relationship				
		Casual	Serious	Steady	Pre-Engaged	Engaged
Differences in degree of commitment	15	9	-	-	-	-
One of us does not listen well	16.5	-	18	16.5	11	-
One of us seems less happy	16.5	13.5	18	16.5	-	17.5
Nagging	18	-	18	-	-	4
Failure to discuss differences calmly	19	-	15	-	10	-
One of us is undependable/irresponsible	20.5	11.5	-	11.5	-	-
Some of our friends disapprove of partner	20.5	13.5	10.5	-	-	-
Do not receive enough compliments	22	-	21	5.5	-	8
One of us had an interest in another person	23	3	-	-	-	-
Would rather confide in friend than partner	24.5	4	-	-	-	-
Differences in important values	24.5	-	15	16.5	-	-
Personality differences	26.5	-	-	-	-	8
We seem to have less shared interest	26.5	-	21	16.5	-	-

TABLE II (Continued)

Conflict Description	Overall Rank	Stage of Relationship				
		Casual	Serious	Steady	Pre-Engaged	Engaged
Uneasiness in expressing feelings to partner	28	8	-	-	-	-
Worry about the number of arguments we have	29.5	-	-	-	-	11.5
Partner's opposite sex friends	29.5	-	21	-	-	11.5
Conflicting viewpoints about marriage	31	-	-	16.5	-	-
Insensitive to partner's feelings	32	16.5	-	-	-	-
Not taking partner's opinion seriously	35.5	-	-	-	-	17.5
Personal habits	38	-	-	-	-	17.5
Disagreements about the desire for sex	38	-	-	16.5	-	-
Spent too much time together	38	-	-	9	-	-
Lack of physical affection	40	-	-	-	-	17.5
Moral dilemma about sex (Right/Wrong)	42	-	-	9	-	-
Alcohol/Drug usage	43	16.5	-	-	-	-
Discuss issues at improper place/time	46	-	-	-	-	17.5

the most common conflict. Steady and pre-engaged daters ranked "living far apart makes dating difficult" as the main conflict. Engaged daters ranked "lack of time spent together" as the most common conflict experienced in their relationships.

Hypothesis II. Men will report different types of primary relationship conflicts than women.

This hypothesis reflects findings in research studies that males and females experience different types of relationship conflicts. Hill (1976) reported that males more often than females reported the following conflicts, in decreasing order of frequency: the females desire for independence, differences in interests, conflicting sex attitudes, conflicting marriage ideas, interest in another male, difference in intelligence, pressure from female's parents, and pressure from male's parents.

The mean scores of how males and females rated frequencies of conflicts were compared with a One-Way Analysis of Variance. Since the results are limited as a result of sample size, the mean scores were ranked to provide a descriptive summary for this hypothesis.

Table III list the ranks associated with various conflicts for men and women and revealed that two

TABLE III
RELATIONSHIP CONFLICTS RANKED
BY SEX OF RESPONDENTS

Conflict Description	Overall Rank	Sex	
		Male	Female
Living far apart makes dating difficult	1	1	1
Lack of time spent together	2	2	2
Moodiness	3	4	3
Sarcasm	4	-	4
I feel I "Give" more than I "Get"	5.5	5	10.5
One of us takes the other for granted	5.5	7.5	5.5
One of us becomes angry when we disagree	7.5	7.5	7
One of us is too independent	7.5	9.5	5.5
Our involvement with school studies	9	3	-
Jealousy	10	11.5	9
Immaturity	11.5	15	10.5
Remarks are made that hurts other's feelings	11.5	-	8**

TABLE III (Continued)

Conflict Description	Overall Rank	Sex	
		Male	Female
Frequency of major disagreements	13	16	12
Do not understand partner's viewpoint	14	18	13
Differences in degree of commitment	15	20	14
One of us does not listen well	16.5	18	18
One of us is less happy with this relationship	16.5	-	17
Nagging	18	-	15.5
Failure to discuss differences calmly	19	-	15.5*
Undependable/irresponsible	20.5	13.5	-
Some of our friends disapprove of partner	20.5	-	-

*P < .06

**P < .02

conflicts reached significant levels, "failure to discuss differences calmly" and "one of us makes remarks that hurts others feeling." In both conflict areas, females were most likely to state that it was a problem in their relationships. The most common overall conflict, "living far apart makes dating difficult," was also the most frequent conflict reported by both males and females.

Hypothesis III. The importance of communication skills will be different according to stage of dating (casual, serious, steady, pre-engaged, and engaged).

Hicks (1971) stated that successful relationships are characterized as having effective, open, and rewarding communication patterns. Schindler et al. (1983) reported that communication difficulties are the most frequently cited problem for couples who want to improve their relationships.

A one way analysis of variance was used to examine this hypothesis. The mean scores were ranked to provide a descriptive summary for this variable.

Table IV lists stage differences in the importance of communication skills. The most important communication skill ranked first by both casual and serious daters was "for partner to express his/her

TABLE IV
IMPORTANCE OF COMMUNICATION SKILLS
RANKED BY STAGE OF RELATIONSHIP

Communication Skill	Overall Rank	Stage of Relationship				
		Casual	Serious	Steady	Pre-Engaged	Engaged
For partner to express his/her feelings	1	1	1	3.5	3	1.5
To talk with my partner with ease	2	5	3	1	3	3
For partner to listen to me	3	2	3	2	3	4
To express my feelings to me partner	4	5	3	3.5	6.5	5.5
For partner to be sensitive to my feelings	5	3	6	5	5	1.5
To speak for myself in situations	6.5	5	6	6.5	6.5	9
For partner to understand my point of view	6.5	7.5	8	6.5	1	5.5
For me to enhance my partner's self esteem	8	7.5	6	8	8	7
For partner to enhance my self esteem	9	9	10	9	9	8
For partner to compromise when we disagree	10	10	9	10	10	10

feelings." Steady daters reported "to talk with my partner with ease" as the number one ranked communication skill. Pre-engaged daters ranked "for partner to understand my point of view" as the most important skill. Engaged daters ranked as the most important skill both "for partner to express his/her feelings" and "for partner to be sensitive to my feelings."

Hypothesis IV. Men will report different ratings on the importance of communication skills than women.

A study conducted by Hayes, Stinnett, and Defrain (1980) reported that a problem in relationships occurred when a partner was unwilling to talk or share feelings. Lack of openness is more common among men than women. McMillan (1969) reported that women reported lack of communication as a major problem in their relationships.

A one-way analysis of variance was used to examine this hypothesis. The mean scores were ranked for a descriptive summary.

In Table V are the revealed sex differences in communication skills. The most important communication skill reported by both males and females was "for partner to express his/her feelings." For all other

TABLE V
IMPORTANCE OF COMMUNICATION SKILLS
RANKED BY SEX OF RESPONDENTS

Communication Skill	Overall Rank	Sex	
		Male	Female
For partner to express his/her feelings	1	1	1
To talk with my partner with ease	2	2	4
For partner to listen to me	3	3	2
To express my feelings to my partner	4	5	3
For partner to be sensitive to my feelings	5	4	5
To speak for myself in situations	6.5	8	6
For partner to understand my point of view	6.5	6.5	7
For me to enhance my partner's self esteem	8	6.5	8
For partner to enhance my self esteem	9	10	9
For partner to compromise when we have differences	10	9	10

communication skills, females and males reported different ratings on the importance of communication skills.

Hypothesis V. Persons in higher stages of dating (casual, serious, steady, pre-engaged, engaged) have different ratings on the importance of specific characteristics of a dating partner.

Table VI reveals the ranked stage differences in the degree of importance in characteristics desired in a dating partner. The quality "to be honest/truthful" was ranked first for all stages.

This hypothesis reflects the process of relationship development. The causal stage of dating is basically for fun, recreation, and there is no commitment to the partner. Couples may seek to identify areas of similarity and dissimilarity relative to interests in hobbies, recreation, sports, and goals in life. As the relationship progresses to higher stages of dating, the couples may compare compatibilities in values and personality traits. Lewis (1972) stated that being similar in social background, values, personality, and interests facilitates the process of relationship development.

Hypothesis VI. Males will have different ratings

TABLE VI
IMPORTANCE OF PARTNER CHARACTERISTICS
RANKED BY STAGE OF RELATIONSHIP

Partner Qualities	Overall Rank	Stage of Relationship				
		Casual	Serious	Steady	Pre-Engaged	Engaged
To be honest/truthful	1	1	1	1	1	1
To be dependable/responsible	2	2	2.5	5	3	4
To express love/affection towards me	3	4.5	2.5	3.5	4.5	2.5
To be a good listener	4	3	8	3.5	2	2.5
To want me to grow as a person	5	8.5	7	6.5	4.5	7
To have a sense of humor	6	4.5	5.5	10	6	10
To cheer me up when I am upset/feeling blue	7	6	9	8	7	5
To express appreciation to me	8	7	4	6.5	8	7
To be a good conversationalist	9	8.5	5.5	2	9	-
To dress neatly	10	-	-	9	-	10
To be physically attractive	11	10	10	-	10	-
To make decisions easily	12	-	-	-	-	-
To have similar goals in life as me	13	-	-	-	-	10
To be members of same ethnic/racial group	14	-	-	-	-	7

on the importance of specific characteristics of a dating partner than females.

This hypothesis reflects the notion that males and females have different preferences for what are considered to be desirable characteristics in a dating partner. Bolig, Stein, and Mckenry (1984) reported that physical attractiveness of a partner is more important for males than females, and that males prefer a female who is either the same age or younger.

A one-way analysis of variance was used to examine this hypothesis. The mean scores were ranked to provide a descriptive summary for this hypothesis.

The rankings are listed in Table VII. Although both sexes were very similar in their rankings, some differences by sex were noted. Three characteristics reached significant levels: "to be honest/truthful," "to be a good listener," and "to want me to grow as a person." Females were more likely to rate "to be honest/truthful," "to be a good listener," and "to want me to grow as a person" higher than males.

Other Research Questions Addressed

In addition to the six hypotheses examined in this research study, this section was included to examine a

TABLE VII
IMPORTANCE OF PARTNER CHARACTERISTICS
RANKED BY SEX OF RESPONDENTS

Partner Qualities ¹	Overall Rank	Sex	
		Male	Female
To be honest/truthful	1	1	1
To be dependable/responsible	2	2.5	3
To express love/affection towards me	3	2.5	4
To be a good listener**	4	7	2
To want me to grow as a person**	5	9	5
To have a sense of humor	6	4	7
To cheer me up when I'm upset/feeling blue	7	6	6
To express appreciation to me	8	5	8
To be a good conversationalist	9	8	9
To dress neatly	10	-	10
To be physically attractive	11	10	-

¹Actual mean comparisons were made using analysis of variance

*P < .05

**P < .01

number of issues. Although relevant to the purpose of this study, these issues are peripheral to the hypotheses and therefore treated separately.

Twenty-six of the fifty-four conflict items from the premarital dating conflict scale were organized into categories of conflict. This procedure resulted in ten broad categories of conflicts. The categories and the items used from the overall scale are listed in Appendix D. The ten conflict categories were examined by stage and sex differences. This issue was examined with the SPSS Breakdown Procedure, which resulted in a one-way analysis of variance. The stage differences in categories of conflicts are presented in Table VIII. Casual daters reported "commitment" as the most common conflict category. Serious daters ranked "power" as the most frequently occurring conflict category. Steady daters ranked "personality" as the highest ranked conflict category. Pre-engaged daters reported both "time together" and "personality" as the most common conflict. Engaged daters ranked "time together" as the most common conflict category.

Sex differences in categories of conflicts are listed in Table IX. The first ranked conflict category reported by males was "time together," while females

TABLE VIII
CATEGORIES OF CONFLICTS BY
STAGE OF RELATIONSHIP*

Conflict Categories	Overall Rank	Stage of Relationship				
		Casual	Serious	Steady	Pre- Engaged	Engaged
Time together	1	2	5	2	1.5	1
Commitment	2	1	2	3	5	3
Personality	3	5	4	1	1.5	2
Power	4	4	1	5	3	5
Friends	5	6	3	9	4	4
Communication	6	3	7	7	6	6.5
Habits	7	7	6	10	9	9
Values	8	9	9	6	7	8
Background	9	10	8	8	8	6.5
Sex	10	8	10	4	10	10

*Items used to create the ten categories listed above are presented in Appendix D.

TABLE IX
CATEGORIES OF CONFLICTS BY SEX
OF RESPONDENTS

Conflict Category	Overall Rank	Sex	
		Male	Female
Time together	1	1	3
Commitment difference	2	2	1
Personality	3	3	2
Power	4	5	4
Friends	5	4	6
Communication	6	6	5
Habits	7	8	8
Values	8	10	7
Background	9	7	9
Sex conflicts	10	9	10

ranked "commitment differences" as the most common conflict category.

Another research interest in this study involved the identification of sex differences in methods used to resolve conflict. Research studies have examined the effects of conflict on the degree of marital satisfaction. Madden (1981) found that being able to resolve conflicts results in marital satisfaction, while the avoidance of conflicts and the inability to satisfactorily resolve conflicts may result in nagging, bickering, yelling, violence, and overall marital dissatisfaction. Knapp (1984) stated that the effect of conflict on interpersonal relationships is neither good nor bad, but is dependent upon the manner in which couples deal with their conflict situations.

The SPSS Crosstab procedure was used to examine this research issue; however, due to the small sample size, the four responses from the original conflict resolution scale were collapsed into the two categories of "self" and "partner." The responses of "neither" and "both" were eliminated. The result was a 2 x 2 contingency table which revealed the manner in which couples react to resolve conflicts. The table revealed males' perceptions of how males resolve conflicts and

male perceptions how females react to resolve conflicts, and female perceptions of how females resolve conflicts and female perceptions how males react to resolve conflict.

Table X identifies sex differences in methods of dealing with resolving interpersonal conflicts. Males report that females deal with conflict by:

1. "acts opposite of the way she feels;"
2. "says nothing, otherwise we will argue;" and
3. "goes along with whatever other partner decides."

Relative to female perception of the manner in which males deal with conflicts, males:

1. "prefer to discuss one issue at a time;"
2. "physically leaves when we have disagreements;" and
3. "takes it out on something else."

The following methods of dealing with conflict are reported by both males and females as characteristics of how their partners handle conflict:

1. "refuses to talk about disagreements;"
2. "avoids the issue;"
3. "changes the subject when we have disagreements;"

TABLE X
METHODS OF CONFLICT RESOLUTION

Method of Dealing with Conflict	Male		Female		P	Trend
	Self	Partner	Self	Partner		
Acts opposite the way he/she feels	3	6	10	7	n.s.	*, **
Prefers to discuss one issue at a time	4	2	3	5	n.s.	***, ****
Discusses many issues when we began with just one	5	2	8	6	n.s.	***, **
Would like to resolve more conflicts than we do	5	3	13	1	n.s.	***, **
Refuses to talk about the disagreement	2	11	4	11	n.s.	*, ****
Seeks to discover alterna- tive solutions to issues	6	-	8	3		**
Acknowledge own contribu- tion to the issue	5	1	7	3		***, **
Has to rationalize his/her opinion to the issue	7	3	8	8	n.s.	***
Yells/shouts when we discuss differences	4	3	7	6		***, **
Partner hits/abuses me	2	-	1	-	-	-
Blames self for the conflict	8	4	17	2	n.s.	***, **
Avoids the issue	5	8	5	9	n.s.	*, ****
Changes the subject when we have a disagreement	3	7	9	12	n.s.	*, ****

TABLE X (Continued)

Method of Dealing with Conflict	Male		Female		P	Trend
	Self	Partner	Self	Partner		
Is willing to compromise	5	1	12	3	n.s.	***, **
Denies there is a conflict	3	9	1	11	n.s.	*, ****
More willing to discuss differences than partner	8	4	16	8	n.s.	***, **
Physically leaves when we have a disagreement	5	5	3	9	n.s.	****
Becomes silent when we have a disagreement	9	8	14	12	n.s.	***, **
Says comment but leaves before partner can reply	2	4	5	6		*, ****
Says nothing, otherwise we will argue	3	4	9	7	n.s.	*, **
Goes along with whatever other partner decides	5	6	8	4	n.s.	*, **
"Takes it out" on something else	12	1	3	9	.003	***, ****
Decides what action will be taken to end issues	7	1	5	3		***, **

*males say female
 **female say female
 ***male say male
 ****female say male

4. "denies there is a conflict;" and
5. says comments but leaves before partner can reply.

The above findings represent general trends that are not statistically significant. The only topic that was statistically significant is the complaint that men are much more likely than women to "take out their conflicts on something else."

CHAPTER V

SUMMARY

The purpose of this study was to identify stage and gender differences in conflicts, communication skills, and qualities desired in a dating partner. This purpose was accomplished with a new research questionnaire, which measures the frequencies of conflicts, the importance of communication skills, and the importance of desirable partner characteristics.

Through the identification of conflicts and being able to communicate about those conflicts, single adults may be provided with an important insight relative to the importance of being able to satisfactorily resolve differences experienced in their relationships. Otherwise, couples may enter marriage unaware of the manner that their spouse will react to conflict situations.

The dating process may provide each individual of the dyad an opportunity to identify his or her own needs, interests, values, and assess the degree of compatibility with the partner's needs, interests, and values. Being able to identify desirable partner

characteristics may serve as a filtering process to screen out an incompatible dating partner. Consequently, an individual may have greater insight into desirable characteristics of a future spouse.

Review of Pertinent Literature

The best time to learn about marriage is before taking the marital vow; however, daters may not always know what is involved in the process of learning about marriage. One way to learn about marriage is to assess dating experiences.

One difficulty of learning about marriage is that some conflicts are more commonly experienced in marriage and not always experienced in dating relationships. Some of these experiences may include the issues of children, wives' employment and career status, in-laws, role expectations, and religion. Daters may need to discuss these issues in order to identify their areas of agreement and differences.

Theories provide some criteria in order to assess some dynamics involved in interpersonal relationships. Some of these criteria may include the degree of feeling relaxed and comfortable with each other, patterns of self disclosure, the degree to which

interpersonal needs are satisfied, the degree of compatibility in values and interests, power structure, or who makes decisions, the amount of affection experienced in the relationship, the strength of commitment to the relationship, and the perception of the partners' strength of commitment to the relationship.

Once daters are able to assess experiences in their dating relationships, they may have an awareness of expectations desired in a future spouse and become aware of some dynamics involved in marital relationships. Hopefully, after assessing dating experiences, the daters would be able to project these experiences in a future marital relationship, determine which experiences would be appropriate for marriage, and the end result would possibly be a high quality and stable marital relationship.

Summary of Methods

The purposes of this research study were to identify frequency of conflicts, the importance of communication skills, and the importance of characteristics desired in a dating partner. The purposes were accomplished with the research instrument

called Couples Assessment of Relationship Experiences (CARE).

Subjects

Subject selection consisted of single college students who lived on the campus of Oklahoma State University campus during the Spring 1986 semester. A purposive sample was used in conjunction with random selection. Every fifth name was selected from the roster of students in a dormitory to obtain a desired target of 250 subjects.

There were 69 of 250 questionnaires returned, which resulted in a response rate of 28 percent. The sample included 27 males (39.1 percent) and 42 females (60.9 percent). A profile of the respondents revealed that the greatest percentage of the subjects (37.7 percent) were 20 years old, were basically Freshmen and Sophomores (81.2 percent), were Arts and Science majors (31.9 percent). The greatest percentage of subjects dated 6 to 10 people (33.3 percent), while the greatest percent of subjects had 1 to 2 serious relationships. The subjects listed themselves in the following stages of dating: casual (21.7 percent), serious (21.7 percent), steady (18.8 percent), pre-engaged (17.4

percent), and engaged (11.6 percent).

Instrumentation

The research instrument used in this research study was called Couples Assessment of Relationship Experiences (CARE). The main independent variables were stages of dating (casual, serious, steady, pre-engaged and engaged) and sex. The dependent variables consisted of the subscales and/or items from the research questionnaire CARE. These include frequencies of conflicts, the manner in which couples react to resolve conflicts, communication skills, and characteristics desired in a dating partner.

The frequencies of conflict items included 54 items students rated on a 5-point scale. Response choices ranged from: (1) never; to, (5) very often.

The conflict resolution scale consisted of 23 items designed to assess the male's and female's perceptions how each sex reacts to resolve conflicts. Response choices were (1) neither, (2) self, (3) partner, and (4) both.

The communication skill scale measured the importance of communication skills and consisted of ten items on a five-point scale. Response choices ranged

from: (1) unimportant; to, (4) extremely important.

The characteristics desired in a dating partner scale measure the degree of importance in characteristics desired in a dating partner and consisted of 21 items on a four-point scale. Response choices ranged from: (1) unimportant; to, (4) very important.

Data Collection Procedures

The 250 questionnaires were sent to the respondents through campus mail during the Spring 1986 semester. The subjects returned the questionnaires by campus mail without expense to the subjects. Each returned questionnaire was assigned a three-digit identification number. Since a number was used rather than a name, confidentiality for the subjects was guaranteed.

Statistical Analysis

Results were originally calculated with parametric statistics, however, due to sample size, most of the findings were reported with descriptive statistics and rankings. Significance of differences between groups are provided wherever it is appropriate and limitation

of sample size are noted.

The Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) at Oklahoma State University was used to analyze the data. Most of the results in Chapter IV were analyzed with the Breakdown procedure in SPSS, which resulted in a one-way analysis of variance. Other research questions were examined with SPSS Crosstabs procedure, which resulted in a chi square analysis with a contingency table.

Limitations

One limitation is a small sample size. This results in an inability to accurately interpret statistical analysis. Another limitation related to small sample size is not knowing how similar or different the non-respondents are from the respondents.

Other limitations include incomplete questionnaires, no follow-up reminders to non-respondents, and the use of a new research instrument, which lacks reliability and validity.

Summary of Findings

After examining the six hypotheses and other research issues addressed, the following is a summary

of the trends that were found.

Relative to stage differences in conflicts, the highest ranked conflict reported by casual and engaged stages was "lack of time spent together." For the serious daters, "one of us is too independent" was ranked first. The steady and pre-engaged daters ranked "living far apart makes dating difficult" as the most common conflict.

Relative to gender differences in conflicts, both males and females ranked as the most common conflict "living far apart makes dating difficult."

A reason the conflict "lack of time spent together" was ranked as the most common conflict in the casual stage of dating may be that the casual stage is the most uncommitted relationship. Consequently, the couple may not date on a regular and frequent basis. Relationships require regular and frequent interaction over time in order to progress to higher stages of dating.

Although the engaged individuals also reported "lack of time spent together" as the highest ranked conflict, this stage is a committed relationship. They have dated each other exclusively and have solidified plans for marriage. Consequently, these couples are

more likely to remain intact and not feel threatened by lack of time spent together.

As relationships progress from casual stages to higher stages of dating, they may need to discuss issues of independence, or power related issues. "Living far apart makes dating difficult" may result from these subjects, who lived on campus, may have a dating partner who lived off campus, or a lack of transportation may account for this conflict issue. Physical proximity facilitates relationship development.

Relative to stage differences in the degree of importance of communication skills, both casual and serious daters ranked "for partner to express his/her feelings" as the most important skill. Steady daters reported "to talk with my partner with ease" as the highest ranked skill. The pre-engaged stage reported "for partner to understand my point of view" as the highest ranked skill. Engaged daters reported both "for partner to express his/her feelings" and "for partner to be sensitive to my feelings" as the highest ranked skills.

Relative to sex differences in the degree of importance of communication skills, both males and

females reported "for partner to express his/her feelings" as the most important skill.

This finding reflects the trend that being sensitive to feelings, being able to talk easily with each other, and understanding each other's viewpoint are important components of effective communication desired by couples in their relationships.

For stage differences in characteristics desired in a dating partner, all stages ranked as first the characteristic "to be honest/truthful" as the most important characteristics. In the analysis by gender, males and females also ranked highest the characteristic "to be honest/truthful." This finding reflects the trend that personality related traits are important in dating relationships, even at early stages of dating.

Relative to stage differences in the most common categories of conflicts, casual daters reported "commitment" as the number one conflict category. Serious daters ranked as first "power" as the highest ranked category of conflict. Steady daters ranked "personality" as the number one ranked category of conflict. Pre-engaged daters ranked both "time together" and "personality" as the most common conflict

categories. Engaged daters ranked "time together" as the number one conflict category.

These findings reflect the trend that the early stages of relationship development have low levels of commitment. People want to find out about the other person before committing themselves to that partner. As relationships progress, power becomes an issue for couples to consider in their relationships. As relationships progress even further, personality traits become revealed and may be considered problematic. Either too much or too little time becomes problematic as relationships progress in the higher stages of dating. With college students, time related conflicts may not be unusual.

Relative to the manner in which couples react to resolve conflicts, only "takes it out on something else" reached a significant level. Males reported this among themselves and females also reported this as being common among their male dating partners. This finding may reflect the trend that males are more likely than females to be physically expressive as an attempt to resolve conflicts.

Recommendations

In order to overcome some of the limitations mentioned in Chapter III and to make the research instrument (CARE) a statistically stronger instrument, the following recommendations are suggested:

1. To replicate this study with a larger sample size.
2. To establish a reliability rating for the research instrument (CARE).
3. To include a diversity of demographic variables.

The research instrument may provide daters the opportunity to assess their dating experiences relative to conflicts, the manner in which daters react to resolve conflicts, communication skills, and desirable partner qualities.

More research is needed to identify educational and therapeutic approaches for dealing with conflict resolution strategies. Daters may need to experience some type of skills orientation, or practical application of learning about communication skills and conflict resolution. A lecture format may not be as effective as a practical approach for learning.

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APPENDIXES

APPENDIX A

CATEGORIES FROM CARE

APPENDIX A

CATEGORIES FROM CARE

Category	# items	Item response range	Item measurement level
Premarital dating conflicts	54	1-5	Likert-Type (Interval)
Conflict resolution	23	1-4	Nominal
Importance of communication skills	10	1-4	Likert-Type (Interval)
Partner characteristics	21	1-4	Likert-Type (Interval)
.	.	.	.

APPENDIX B

CARE INVENTORY



Oklahoma State University

DEPARTMENT OF FAMILY RELATIONS
AND CHILD DEVELOPMENT

STILLWATER, OKLAHOMA 74078
241 HOME ECONOMICS WEST
(405) 624-5057

April 9, 1986

Dear Student:

You have been selected as one of only 250 students at O.S.U. to take part in an important research project sponsored by the Department of Family Relations and Child Development. Your name will not be used in any way so that we can guarantee confidentiality and you can feel free to express your most honest opinions.

The project is designed to identify the most common types of relationship conflicts experienced by college students and some of the ways these conflicts are handled. You are invited to comment about your experiences in any type of present or past relationship. It will only take about 20-30 minutes to complete.

If you would like a copy of the basic findings of the study, please enclose an envelope with your address (name optional). Also, if you are interested in having a present dating partner fill out the questionnaire, let us know and we will send an extra copy.

PLEASE USE THE ENCLOSED ENVELOPE FOR RETURN MAIL. JUST PLACE IN ANY CAMPUS MAILBOX BY APRIL 21.

We appreciate your help during this busy time of year. We hope the questionnaire will cover some topics that are of interest to you.

Sincerely,

John Dubala
M.S. Graduate Student
Family Relations
and Child Development

David Fournier, Ph.D.
Faculty Advisor
Family Relations
and Child Development

jj

C A R E

COUPLES ASSESSMENT OF RELATIONSHIP EXPERIENCES

A PROJECT SPONSORED BY THE DEPARTMENT OF FAMILY RELATIONS AND CHILD DEVELOPMENT

OKLAHOMA STATE UNIVERSITY

C O N F I D E N T I A L

GENERAL BACKGROUND INFORMATION (Please answer each question)

Birth Date: _____ Sex: ____ Male ____ Female
 Month/Day/Year

College Major _____

Year in School: Frosh Soph Junior Senior Grad Other
(Circle One)

_____ Check here if your present dating partner would
also like to participate in this study.

Check the stage of dating relationship you presently have or have had with this person:

[illegible]

Circle the point on the scale to indicate the strength of your commitment to this relationship:

Low Commitment	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	High Commitment
-------------------	---	---	---	---	---	---	---	---	---	--------------------

Circle the point on this scale to indicate what you consider to be the strength of the other person's commitment to this relationship:

Low										High
Commitment	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	Commitment

The following are some common problems in dating relationships. Please circle your response that comes closest to your experience with each of the common problem topics.

Never	Rarely (once a year)	Sometimes (once a month)	Often (once a week)	Very Often (almost daily)
1	2	3	4	5

- | | | | | | | |
|----|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | living far apart makes dating difficult |
| 2. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | concern about how often we have major disagreements |
| 3. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | age differences create problems |
| 4. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | lack of transportation to do things |
| 5. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | experience boredom as a couple |
| 6. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | do not receive enough compliments from partner |
| 7. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | concern about differences in degree of commitment |
| 8. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | worry about the number of arguments we have |

Never	Rarely (once a year)	Sometimes (once a month)	Often (once a week)	Very Often (almost daily)
1	2	3	4	5

9. 1 2 3 4 5 failure to discuss differences in a calm manner
10. 1 2 3 4 5 one of us becomes angry when we disagree
11. 1 2 3 4 5 one of us is undependable/irresponsible
12. 1 2 3 4 5 cultural/ethnic factors cause problems
13. 1 2 3 4 5 discuss issues at improper places/times
14. 1 2 3 4 5 partner seems to want to control our relationship
15. 1 2 3 4 5 do not understand the other's partner's viewpoint
16. 1 2 3 4 5 I feel I "give" more than I "get"
17. 1 2 3 4 5 disapprove of partner's opposite sex friends
18. 1 2 3 4 5 uneasiness in expressing feelings to partner
19. 1 2 3 4 5 one of us is interested in another person
20. 1 2 3 4 5 one of us takes the other for granted
21. 1 2 3 4 5 immaturity by self/partner causes problems
22. 1 2 3 4 5 one of us is too independent
23. 1 2 3 4 5 some of our friends disapprove of partner
24. 1 2 3 4 5 we seem to have less shared interests
25. 1 2 3 4 5 personal habits of self or partner
26. 1 2 3 4 5 jealousy in this relationship
27. 1 2 3 4 5 one of us does not listen very well
28. 1 2 3 4 5 alcohol/drug usage by self/partner
29. 1 2 3 4 5 lack of physical affection causes problems
30. 1 2 3 4 5 lying or dishonesty by self/partner
31. 1 2 3 4 5 difficulty talking with each other
32. 1 2 3 4 5 would rather confide in friend than with partner

Never		Rarely (once a year)		Sometimes (once a month)		Often (once a week)		Very Often (almost daily)
1		2		3		4		5

- 33. 1 2 3 4 5 conflicting viewpoints about marriage
- 34. 1 2 3 4 5 physical abuse has been experienced
- 35. 1 2 3 4 5 moodiness by self/partner
- 36. 1 2 3 4 5 nagging by either self or partner
- 37. 1 2 3 4 5 one of us makes remarks that hurts others feelings
- 38. 1 2 3 4 5 one of us does not take partner's opinion seriously
- 39. 1 2 3 4 5 one of our parents disapproves of partner
- 40. 1 2 3 4 5 sexual infidelity by self/partner
- 41. 1 2 3 4 5 personality differences
- 42. 1 2 3 4 5 membership in different religions
- 43. 1 2 3 4 5 differences in role expectations
- 44. 1 2 3 4 5 the issue of equality causes conflict
- 45. 1 2 3 4 5 one of us makes sarcastic remarks
- 46. 1 2 3 4 5 one of us seems less happy with this relationship
- 47. 1 2 3 4 5 disagreements about the desire for sex
- 48. 1 2 3 4 5 discussions about differences in important values
- 49. 1 2 3 4 5 our involvement with school studies
- 50. 1 2 3 4 5 spend too much time together
- 51. 1 2 3 4 5 lack of time spent together
- 52. 1 2 3 4 5 lack of trust has been experienced
- 53. 1 2 3 4 5 one of us is insensitive to partner's feelings
- 54. 1 2 3 4 5 moral dilemma about sex (right/wrong)

_____ other _____
 (please specify)

Of the previously mentioned problem areas, please list the 3 problems that occur most frequently in your relationship.

1. _____

2. _____

3. _____

Please circle your degree of satisfaction with your conflict resolution methods, with 1 being the least satisfied and 6 being the most satisfied:

Extremely							Extremely
Dissatisfied	1	2	3	4	5	6	Satisfied

Take a moment to reflect on your typical style of handling relationship conflicts and respond to the following statements by circling the ways in which you and your partner deal with conflicts in your relationship:

S = self; P = partner; B = both; N = Neither

- | | | | | | |
|-----|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1. | S | P | B | N | acts opposite of the way he/she feels |
| 2. | S | P | B | N | prefers to discuss one issue at a time |
| 3. | S | P | B | N | discusses many issues when we began with just one |
| 4. | S | P | B | N | would like to resolve more conflicts than we do |
| 5. | S | P | B | N | refuses to talk about the disagreement |
| 6. | S | P | B | N | seeks to discover alternative solutions to issues |
| 7. | S | P | B | N | acknowledge own contribution to the issue |
| 8. | S | P | B | N | has to rationalize his/her opinion in the issue |
| 9. | S | P | B | N | yells/shouts when we discuss differences |
| 10. | S | P | B | N | partner hits/abuses me |
| 11. | S | P | B | N | blames self for the conflict |
| 12. | S | P | B | N | avoids the issue |

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_____none _____1 or 2 _____3 to 5

_____6 to 10 _____11 to 20 _____more than 20 _____
(please specify)

_____ none _____ 1 or 2 _____ 3 to 5
 _____ 6 to 10 _____ 11 or more _____
 (please specify)

Please list any "pet names" or "made up names," such as "babe" or "honey," that you may have for each other in this relationship:

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____

Please check the importance of the following communication skills in your dating relationship:

- | Unimportant | Somewhat
Important | Very
Important | Extremely
Important | |
|-----------------------------|-----------------------|-------------------|------------------------|--|
| 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | |
| 1. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 for partner to listen to me |
| 2. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 to express my feelings to my partner |
| 3. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 for partner to express his/her feelings |
| 4. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 to speak for myself in situations |
| 5. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 to talk with my partner with ease |
| 6. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 for partner to compromise when we have differences |
| 7. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 for partner to understand my point of view |
| 8. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 for partner to be sensitive to my feelings |
| 9. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 for partner to enhance my self esteem |
| 10. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 for me to enhance my partner's self esteem |
| ____ Other (please specify) | | | | |

Please indicate how important each of following qualities or characteristics in a dating partner are to you.

	Unimportant		Somewhat Important		Important		Very Important
	1		2		3		4
1.	1	2	3	4	to be honest/truthful		
2.	1	2	3	4	to express appreciation to me		
3.	1	2	3	4	to express love/affection towards me		
4.	1	2	3	4	to make decisions easily		
5.	1	2	3	4	to be physically attractive		
6.	1	2	3	4	to be dependable/responsible		
7.	1	2	3	4	to have similiar interests in music		
8.	1	2	3	4	to want me to grow as a person		
9.	1	2	3	4	to have a sense of humor		
10.	1	2	3	4	to be a good conversationalist		
11.	1	2	3	4	to dress neatly		
12.	1	2	3	4	to be a good listener		
13.	1	2	3	4	to have similiar hobbies/interests		
14.	1	2	3	4	to have similiar interest in recreation/sports as me		
15.	1	2	3	4	to have similiar goals in life as me		
16.	1	2	3	4	to cheer me up when I'm upset/feeling blue		
17.	1	2	3	4	to be members of the same religion		
18.	1	2	3	4	to be members of same ethnic/racial group		
19.	1	2	3	4	to have same amount of completed schooling		
20.	1	2	3	4	to be similiar in age range		
21.	1	2	3	4	to be from the same social class		

APPENDIX C

FIFTY FOUR CONFLICT ITEMS

The following are some common problems in dating relationships. Please circle your response that comes closest to your experience with each of the common problem topics.

	Never		Rarely		Sometimes		Often		Very Often
			(once a year)		(once a month)		(once a week)		(almost daily)
	1		2		3		4		5
1.	1	2	3	4	5	living far apart makes dating difficult			
2.	1	2	3	4	5	concern about how often we have major disagreements			
3.	1	2	3	4	5	age differences create problems			
4.	1	2	3	4	5	lack of transportation to do things			
5.	1	2	3	4	5	experience boredom as a couple			
6.	1	2	3	4	5	do not receive enough compliments from partner			
7.	1	2	3	4	5	concern about differences in degree of commitment			
8.	1	2	3	4	5	worry about the number of arguments we have			
9.	1	2	3	4	5	failure to discuss differences in a calm manner			
10.	1	2	3	4	5	one of us becomes angry when we disagree			
11.	1	2	3	4	5	one of us is undependable/irresponsible			
12.	1	2	3	4	5	cultural/ethnic factors cause problems			
13.	1	2	3	4	5	discuss issues at improper places/times			
14.	1	2	3	4	5	partner seems to want to control our relationship			
15.	1	2	3	4	5	do not understand the other's partner's viewpoint			
16.	1	2	3	4	5	I feel I "give" more than I "get"			
17.	1	2	3	4	5	disapprove of partner's opposite sex friends			
18.	1	2	3	4	5	uneasiness in expressing feelings to partner			
19.	1	2	3	4	5	one of us is interested in another person			
20.	1	2	3	4	5	one of us takes the other for granted			
21.	1	2	3	4	5	immaturity by self/partner causes problems			
22.	1	2	3	4	5	one of us is too independent			
23.	1	2	3	4	5	some of our friends disapprove of partner			
24.	1	2	3	4	5	we seem to have less shared interests			
25.	1	2	3	4	5	personal habits of self or partner			
26.	1	2	3	4	5	jealousy in this relationship			
27.	1	2	3	4	5	one of us does not listen very well			
28.	1	2	3	4	5	alcohol drug usage by self/partner			

29. 1 2 3 4 5 lack of physical affection causes problems
30. 1 2 3 4 5 lying or dishonesty by self/partner
31. 1 2 3 4 5 difficulty talking with each other
32. 1 2 3 4 5 would rather confide in friend than with partner
33. 1 2 3 4 5 conflicting viewpoints about marriage
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52. 1 2 3 4 5 lack of trust has been experienced
53. 1 2 3 4 5 one of us is insensitive to partner's feelings
54. 1 2 3 4 5 moral dilemma about sex (right/wrong)

_____ other _____
(please specify)

APPENDIX D

CONFLICT CATEGORIES

APPENDIX D
CONFLICT CATEGORIES

Scale Name	Item Numbers	Scale Range	Measurement Level	Conceptual Definition
Personality	11, 12, 26 35, 44	5-23	Interval	assesses types of personality traits
Communication	18, 31, 32	3-14	Interval	process of expressing thoughts and feelings
Background	12, 24, 42	3-13	Interval	problems due to interests, cultural/ethnic, religion
Sex	40, 47, 54	3-14	Interval	frequencies of infidelity, desire, and morality of sex
Time Together	50, 51	2-10	Interval	amount of time spent together
Habits	25, 28	2-10	Interval	annoying traits of self/partner
Power	14, 22	2-10	Interval	amount of control, or dominance
Commitment Differences	7, 16	2-10	Interval	problems when one person is more committed than the other
Friends	17, 23	2-10	Interval	comments from friend
Values	43, 44	2-10	Interval	beliefs deemed to be personally important

VITA 2

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